

Noxubee News



Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge News

Issue 19

Winter 2005-6



Hand Painting was a hit at the event thanks to Gail Belk.



The handicapped hunting blind gave visitors a birds-eye view.



John DeFillipo from the Museum of Natural Science in Jackson was popular with "Gator."

Refuge Week Event - Fun for the Whole Family

This year's National Wildlife Refuge Week Event was a grand success! Over 400 visitors enjoyed the beautiful day and all the activities and attractions. Activities included face painting, hand painting that was truly amazing, and paper crafts for children which included making a pop-up alligator, bobcat mask, and origami animals. Representatives of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' Wildlife and Parks instructed the visitors on rabbit-stick throwing much to the delight of many adults as well as children. Other booths included Robert Lytch of the Army Corps of Engineers demonstrating water safety procedures, Dr. Bruce Leopold with a display representing the Wildlife and Fisheries Department of Mississippi State University (MSU), insect collections from the entomology museum at MSU, casting practice for lures, tomahawk throwing, archery practice – shooting at an apple on a mannequin's head, fire equipment demonstrations allowing the visitors to pump water from the pumper truck, and our elevating handicapped hunting blind. Music was provided by a live band, Jubilee.

The Friends of Noxubee Refuge provided great volunteer support! The Nature Store was fully stocked for Christmas and had a great day of sales. Bob Fye's booth of woodcrafts was wonderful to behold.

The Friends Amateur Nature Photography Contest winners were announced and prizes were awarded to the participants who were present. The photos remained on display through December in the visitor center.



1st Place Youth Entry by Mary Catherine McKibben
"Cypress Trees"



1st Place Adult Entry by James Bryant
"Rookery From Boardwalk"

Waterfowl Return to the Refuge

During about the second and third week of November, migratory waterfowl began to arrive on the Refuge and their numbers have demonstrated a substantial increase since. In fact, approximately 7,000 ducks were observed within about 130 acres of moist-soil units in the Refuge's Prisock Field on December 5th. This is the largest concentration of waterfowl observed on the Refuge this early in probably the past 15-20 years. Moist-soil plant production in these impoundments this year was phenomenal, with estimates of high quality native seed availability approaching 1,500 pounds per acre. This has no doubt "set the table" for these birds and likely added to the substantial increase in their numbers. However, the primary factor that has caused this increase is the fall drought that plagued a large portion of the south throughout October and November.



Green-winged teal pair.

The Refuge is very fortunate to have the ability to flood existing impoundments even during drought periods by diverting water from stable water sources such as Ross Branch Reservoir, Bluff Lake, and Oktoc Creek. The Refuge began flooding Prisock Field and GTR 1 impoundments on November 1, and as a result has good areas of water when most other wetland habitats in the area are dry. Over 90% of the ducks on the Refuge are mallards. Other species that can be seen include American wigeon, green-winged teal, pintail, shovelers, gadwalls, and ringneck ducks. Most notable of these species are green-

winged teal and ringneck ducks. Over 2,500 green-winged teal have been observed within the moist soil units and probably just as many ringneck ducks can be seen in either Loakfoma or Bluff Lakes. Many of these ducks are roosting at night in Bluff and Loakfoma Lakes. The Refuge's Goose Overlook and Bluff Lake boardwalk provide excellent vantage points to watch these birds come in at dusk.

Refuge Access Improvements Continue for 2006

More progress is coming our way! On December 5th, the Service presented a grant to the Noxubee County Board of Supervisors to continue road improvements and access to the Refuge. The grant will help fund the paving from Bluff Lake Road to the existing pavement on Lynn Creek Road leading to Highway 45 in Brooksville. The last metal bridge on the spillway at Bluff Lake will also be replaced and the existing (one lane) cement bridge on Bluff Lake will be widened. These improvements will afford a safe a secure route for Refuge visitors coming through Noxubee County and definitely boost Refuge visitation.

The Refuge is currently seeking additional funding to complete paving of the last 2.2-miles of gravel on Loakfoma Road, from the paved portion of Bluff Lake Road to Highway 25 in Winston County. Working with County officials, the Refuge will attempt to provide matching funds in order for Winston County to leverage State Aid funding to complete this last leg of our paving project. Once this portion is completed, all three counties, Oktibbeha, Noxubee, and Winston, will have paved access to the Refuge.

The planning and vision for these improvements were developed in 2000, with a proposal for Public-Highway Discretionary funding submitted by the Refuge and all three counties. The project was coordinated with the Federal Highway Administration and the Mississippi Department of Transportation.

A special thanks is in order to Senator Thad Cochran who proposed that funding be made available and to Senator Trent Lott and Congressman Chip Pickering for their positive support in obtaining the funding to continue working towards the Refuge access improvements. These improvements will provide safe and secure access to over 170,000 visitors annually. It is projected that the Refuge may well have a visitation rate in excess of 500,000 by 2015.



Wildlife Factoids – all about baby names

- ◆ Newborn foxes are called kits while baby bears are called cubs.
- ◆ Ducks have ducklings, Geese have goslings, and Swans have cygnets.
- ◆ Bats have pups and deer have fawns.
- ◆ Newly hatched fish eggs are fry and amphibian eggs hatch into tadpoles.



Sometimes Candy really gets into her work.

Bat Project Update.

Candy Stevenson officially began her research on “Use of hardwood cavities by Rafinesque’s Big-eared bats and Southeastern Myotis as Day Roosts” at Noxubee NWR this fall. She will be working with Dr. Jeanne Jones and Refuge Biologist Richardson on the 2-year project. Though many cavities can be found throughout the hardwood bottoms, not all are alike and most are not suitable for day roosts by these bats. Already the research has shed light on seasonal shifts in the use of cavities by bats as the weather changes. Male and female Rafinesque’s tend to roost separately during the spring and fall but come winter both sexes roost together.



Rafinesque’s bat

This may relate to decreased temperatures as well as the onset of the breeding season beginning in late fall. A second important finding of the research has been the lack of cavities within the red oak tree species. Managers have generally favored oaks for their mast

production utilized by ducks, deer, and turkey. However, these trees do not readily produce cavities needed by many other species including bats. Initial results suggest that sweetgum, blackgum, and various hickories produce basal cavities needed by bats. In addition, old relict cypress (>200 years old) though rare on the Refuge is proving to be a very important roosting site especially for female bats when young are being dropped.



Intern Steven Lewis working on bat study.

A Great Learning Experience At Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge

Before my Wildlife Internship, I enjoyed visiting Noxubee NWR occasionally for fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing. Throughout my internship I have realized how important this Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System is to the public. I met people who use the Refuge as a primary fishing location. Also, many of the hunters I have talked with throughout the hunting season have come from the coast and enjoyed successful hunts and companionship with friends and family. These hunters were so excited to have an opportunity to leave some of the work and cleanup behind for a weekend and enjoy their time with nature.

Noxubee NWR covers an extensive section of land in three counties (Noxubee, Winston, Oktibbeha). With the majority of this Refuge area open for public use, visitors are able to participate in a variety of recreational opportunities the Refuge provides. These opportunities include fishing, biking, hiking, picnicking, wildlife watching, and hunting. Many Mississippi State University students enjoy the many activities the Refuge offers.

I have been a part of a variety of projects that take place at Noxubee. These projects range from hurricane Katrina clean up, wood stork banding and satellite tracking, wood duck banding, deer harvest data collections, and also an on-going bat project. I worked along side Refuge Biologist, David Richardson, learning new techniques and gaining extensive field knowledge that will benefit me for the future. I plan to take what I have learned at Noxubee and build on that in future as a wildlife biologist.

I strongly recommend wildlife and forestry students take advantage of the internship opportunities offered at Noxubee NWR. Also any students who are uncertain of their field of study should come to Noxubee and volunteer some of their time. This will give students the opportunity to see if the natural resources fields interest them. My time at Noxubee is nearly complete, and as I begin to look for a permanent position, I realize the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is the agency I would enjoy working for in the future.

By Steven Lewis, Intern



Spotted salamander

Winter Egg Masses

Have you been out in late December – February and come across a pool of water with a gelatinous looking fist-sized mass of clear eggs with black centers? Well, it's probably the eggs of several species of "mole" salamanders that come out during warm winter nights to breed in these vernal pools. One of the most common species on the Refuge is the spotted salamander which bears yellow spots against a black background. On warm, rainy nights in winter (December – February) this species and several others venture from below ground to permanent and temporary pools to breed. There, males fertilize the eggs as females deposit them often attaching them to submerged twigs. As the eggs are fertilized they swell in size forming the gelatinous mass. In the center of each egg is the small embryo that develops slowly initially until rising water temperatures rapidly increase the rate of growth. The small tadpoles emerge as ¼ inch creatures and quickly seek cover in the pools. Through spring and summer the tadpoles feed on plankton and small invertebrates eventually losing their gills before leaving the ponds. Then they burrow underground where they spend most of their adult lives rarely returning to the surface except to breed.

Calendar of Events

For more information call
662/323-5548

January 7 and 21: Guided Bird Walk

- Come on out and look for eagles and waterfowl. This is the time of year to see the eagles in courtship displays and the waterfowl are still lingering in the lakes and impoundments. 10 a.m. to noon.

February 4: Astronomy for

beginners - What better place to stargaze than the Refuge? No lights to interfere with the viewing! Lawrence Croft, Professor and Head Emeritus, Department of Physics and Astronomy will be presenting a program with a slide show and then go out to see the stars in person. Starting at 5 p.m. in the Tisdale Auditorium.

February 18 and March 4: Annual

Bluebird Workshops - We hope to encourage young birders by inviting parents to bring their children for this workshop. The day includes an information session on the Eastern bluebird, a video and building a bluebird box to take home. Come on out and join in the fun and maybe learn a few things too! 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Call for reservations as space and materials are limited.

March 18: Earth Day Activities –

Come join us for some crafty make-and-take-home fun! Celebrate Earth Day by recycling and using everyday items in creative ways 8 a.m. to noon.



March 18: Photo Walk – A photo experience for everyone. Children and adults need not fear the camera, this walk is to give ideas of photographic topics, to help "see" what can be photographed and to get more comfortable taking pictures. The walk will be led by Friends of Noxubee Refuge member, Linda Lodato, and leave from the visitor center at 8:00 a.m.

April 1: Photography Workshop – A photography workshop conducted by Kermit Denver Laird (local renown professional outdoor photographer) and sponsored by the Friends of Noxubee Refuge will be held in the Tisdale Auditorium starting at 8 a.m. and running all day. Registration is required.

June 10: Noxubee Refuge's Annual Kids Fishing Derby – If everything goes as planned we will hold this event at our *new* fishing pond built for this event. It will take place from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Registration starts May 1.

Comments?

If there are topics you would like included in the next issue, please feel free to contact us and suggest topics. If you would like to contribute an article or information concerning partners or projects (present or future) on the Refuge, please let us know. This newsletter is provided free to all interested persons, and if you would like to be added to the mailing list please contact us. You can call us at 662/323-5548, check out our website at <http://www.fws.gov/noxubee> or email us Noxubee@fws.gov.